

**Shetland Islands Council**  
**Annual Complaints Monitoring Report**  
**2024-25**

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## 1. Introduction

I am pleased to introduce our complaints monitoring report for 2024-25. As a Council, we are committed to monitoring and learning from engagements with our service users, so I feel that our annual report, where we take the opportunity to reflect on what our data is telling us, is always important.

As Chief Executive, I am committed to supporting my staff to view complaint handling as a positive process, moving away from the negativity it usually attracts. Alongside reinforcing our Customer First Charter, which encourages anyone making a complaint to be respectful towards our staff, we continue to encourage a learning culture across services, where staff feel supported to learn from experiences and use the information to help us become a more responsive organisation.

Alongside the performance figures for this past financial year, we have included those for 2022-23 and 2023-24, to help provide some further context and identify trends. Looking at the data, I was struck by the improvements in the time taken to handle complaints. The average time to close a Stage 1 complaint has reduced significantly, from 27 days to 8.6 days. I also noted that over 70% of complaints at Stage 1 and over 80% that reached Stage 2 were closed within the required timescales. That's a marked improvement on 2023-24, when those figures were around 50% and 30% respectively. There will be many reasons to explain the changes, but it is worth noting that improvement in performance is always underpinned by our hard working and dedicated staff.

Our Council delivers excellent services, and we regularly receive positive feedback. Reflecting on, and learning from, positive feedback helps us replicate it, so we have included some of the compliments we received throughout the year. I really enjoyed reading the comments at the end of the report. They are such a good way of connecting with the human element of our service delivery and show how staff are reflecting our Council's Values in their everyday jobs.

I would like to conclude this introduction by thanking all my staff who are involved in handling complaints and customer feedback monitoring.

**Maggie Sandison, Chief Executive**



**Excellent Service**  
**Taking Personal Responsibility**  
**Working Well Together**

## 2. Performance Summary

To help with context, our Complaints Procedure contains two stages. Stage 1 is the ‘frontline’ response where we aim to provide decisions within five working days. The second stage involves complaints that have not been resolved at stage 1 and those that clearly require investigation. The target response time for stage 2 complaints is 20 working days.

We publish performance information on our website, social media channels and also use a digital display screen in the reception at our offices at 8 North Ness. This past year, we have introduced a new email broadcasting service where members of the public can sign-up for monthly news updates from the Council. We will continue to use all these channels to publicise these figures.

**1 in 63**

Roughly one person in 63 in Shetland made a complaint to the Council last year.

**286**

286 complaints were closed at the first stage, 82 at second stage.

**368**

We received 368 complaints last year. A 108% increase on the previous year.

**78%**

We closed around three quarters of complaints at the first stage.

**23 of the 82**

complaints managed at Stage 2 were ‘not upheld’.

**170 of the 286**

complaints closed at Stage 1 were ‘upheld’. 35 were ‘not upheld’ and 34 were ‘resolved’.

**8.6 days**

Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was 8.6 working days.

We closed just below three quarters (73%) of our stage 1 complaints within the 5-day target set out in our procedure. For stage 2 complaints, we closed over eight in ten (83.3%) within the 20-day target.

*“We will be a learning organisation with a culture that supports psychological safety, intellectual bravery, experimentation, innovation and a willingness to learn from our mistakes, our experiences, and from employee, customer and community feedback, without fear or defensiveness”.*

*Our Ambition, 2021-26*

### 3. How we handle complaints

Along with other Councils across Scotland, in March 2021, we adopted the updated Model Complaints Handling Procedures published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. This means that we have a single process for handling complaints across the Council, which helps to make it easier to follow.

A complaint is defined in the procedure as ***“any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf”***.

The procedure sets out the timescales for each stage of the complaints process. Guidance documents accompany the procedure and are all published on our website, here:

[Make a Complaint – Shetland Islands Council](#)

### 4. Indicator 1 – Complaints Received per 1,000 of Population

To help with comparisons across Scotland, all 32 Councils are asked to report on the number of complaints they have received, and this is then shown as a number per thousand of the area’s population.

The population in Shetland, according to National Records of Scotland, is 23,190. So, as we received 368 complaints last year, that gave us a figure for this indicator of 15.9 complaints per 1000 people. Or put another way, roughly one person in 63 in Shetland made a complaint to the Council last year. This figure indicates a significant increase in complaints when reflected against previous years, with 180 complaints in 2022-23 and 177 complaints in 2023-24.

### 5. Indicator 2 – Number of Complaints

This indicator looks at the numbers of complaints that were closed at stages 1 and 2 of our procedure. As noted, we received 368 complaints, with 286 closed at stage 1. Our procedure includes the aim to resolve complaints as close as possible to the point they are made. So, if a complaint can be resolved at stage 1, that is something we would say was good.

- Out of the 368 complaints closed, 78% (286) were closed at Stage 1.
- 82 complaints were closed at Stage 2 of the procedure (22%).
- 0 complaints were closed after they had been escalated (0%).

This is an important measure of how our services are doing on complaint management, so it is worth looking back to see how this compares with previous years:

- 2022-23 – 114 complaints were closed at stage 1 (64%)
- 2023-24 – 286 (78%)

This shows, by this indicator, our performance has improved. While we closed 78% of complaints at stage 1, we always aim to close as high a percentage of complaints at stage 1 as possible. This is an area we will take as an improvement action and will seek, through our Corporate Management Team, to make further improvements. Resolving more complaints at a first stage is quite a good indicator of efficiency, and this is something we have improved on, however we are always keen to improve further.

## 6. Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes Stage 1

This indicator seeks information on the number of complaints that were ‘Upheld’, ‘Partially Upheld’, ‘Not Upheld’ or ‘Resolved’ at the first stage in our procedure. These are also useful figures for understanding how the issues are being managed.

Over the past year, 170 of the 286 complaints closed at Stage 1 were ‘Upheld’, which is a significant increase on the previous few years at 59%.

- 39 complaints were Partially Upheld – 14%
- 35 complaints were Not Upheld – 12%
- 42 complaints were Resolved – 15%

Our procedure defines a complaint as having been ‘resolved’ when ***“both the Council and the customer agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld”***.

**How does this compare with previous years?**

| Year    | Upheld / Percentage | Partially Upheld | Not Upheld | Resolved   |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|------------|------------|
| 2023-24 | 23 (21%)            | 27 (25%)         | 25 (23%)   | 34 (31%)   |
| 2022-23 | 38 (33.4%)          | 26 (22.8%)       | 23 (20.2%) | 27 (23.7%) |

Looking at the last three years, the number of complaints that were ‘upheld’ at Stage 1 has increased significantly to 59%. The rates of ‘partially upheld’ and ‘not upheld’ have decreased to around one in ten. And we have seen the rate of ‘resolved’ complaints at stage 1 drop to around one in ten as well.

## Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes Stage 2

Stage 2 is the final stage that a Council considers complaints. After that, the matter is referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Looking at the figures for this past year:

- 18 of the 84 complaints closed at Stage 2 were Upheld – 21%
- 35 Complaints were Partially Upheld – 42%
- 23 Complaints were Not Upheld – 27%
- 8 Complaints were Resolved – 10%

### How does this compare with previous years?

| Year    | Upheld / Percentage | Partially Upheld | Not Upheld | Resolved |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|------------|----------|
| 2023-24 | 11 (18%)            | 30 (48%)         | 14 (22%)   | 8 (13%)  |
| 2022-23 | 3 (12.5%)           | 17 (70.8%)       | 4 (16.7%)  | 0        |

From this data we can see that most of the complaints dealt with at Stage 2 tend to be ‘partially upheld’.

### Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes from Escalated Complaints

When a person who has made a complaint remains dissatisfied with the response they received at Stage 1 of the process, they can escalate it to the second stage. This indicator looks at the outcomes from those escalated complaints. We had 0 escalated complaints during the last year.

- 0 of the 0 complaints closed after escalation were Upheld - 0%
- No complaints were Partially Upheld after escalation
- No complaints were Not Upheld after escalation
- 0 complaints were Resolved after escalation – 0%

| Year    | Upheld / Percentage | Partially Upheld | Not Upheld | Resolved |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|------------|----------|
| 2023-24 | 1 (33%)             | 0 (0%)           | 0 (0%)     | 2 (66%)  |
| 2022-23 | 7 (17.1%)           | 20 (48.8%)       | 10 (24.4%) | 4 (9.8%) |

Looking at the data, it’s clear that we’ve seen a significant drop over the past three years in the number of complaints that have been escalated. There were 41 in 2022-23, then a big drop to three in 2023-24 and a further drop down to zero in 2024-25.

## 7. Indicator 4 – Average Times

Our procedure includes an aim for us to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within five working days.

As noted previously, we closed 286 complaints at Stage 1, taking a total time of 2,458 working days to do so. Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was 8.6 working days, which is a significant improvement on the previous year. However, taken together with the fact we now close around three quarters within the five-day timescale, there are positive signs of improvement in the efficiency of responding to and closing complaints

The figures for the last three years can be seen in the table and show that our performance in this area has improved by almost 20 days.

| Year    | Average time to close Stage 1 complaint |
|---------|---|
| 2024-25 | 8.6 days                                |
| 2023-24 | 27 days                                 |
| 2022-23 | 14.9 days                               |

We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days.

In 2024/2025, we closed 84 complaints at Stage 2, with a total of 926 working days used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was 11 working days, which is well below our target, and, once again, a significant improvement on 2023-24.

Our figures show that this is an indicator where we have significantly improved our performance, down from 48.7 days in 2023-24.

| Year    | Average time to close Stage 2 complaint |
|---------|---|
| 2024-25 | 11 days                                 |
| 2023-24 | 48.7 days                               |
| 2022-23 | 55.8 days                               |

## 8. Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within 5 working days. In 2024/2025 we closed 286 complaints at Stage 1 with 210 of these within timescale, or around three quarters (73.4%). 3 (1%) were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

**Stage 2** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. In 2024/2025, we closed 84 complaints at Stage 2, with 70 of these within timescale, or 83.3%. 26 (31%) were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

**After Escalation** – in 2024/2025, we closed 0 complaints after Escalation, with 0 of these within timescale, or 0% and the same number was closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

| Year    | Stage 1 – closed within 5 days | Stage 2 – closed within 20 days | Escalated  |
|---------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| 2024-25 | 210 (73.4%)                    | 70 (83.3%)                      | 0 (0%)     |
| 2023-24 | 54 (49.5%)                     | 20 (31.7%)                      | 1 (33.3%)  |
| 2022-23 | 86 (75.4%)                     | 11 (45.8%)                      | 18 (43.9%) |

## 9. Indicator 6 – Extensions to Timescales

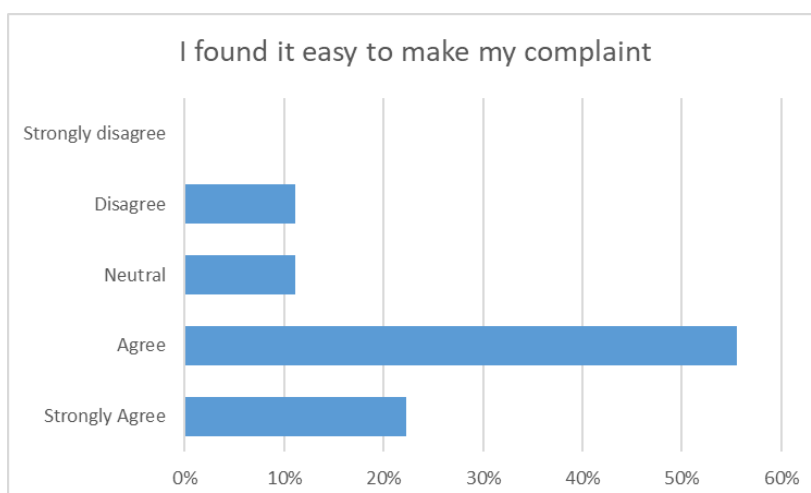
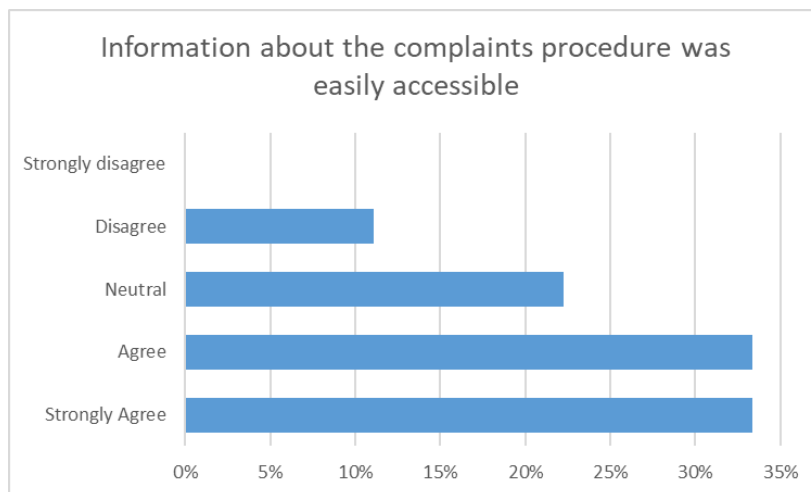
Our Complaints Procedure allows for the timescales in Stage 1 and 2 complaints to be extended by agreement with the person making the complaint. This indicator looks at the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed after an extension to the 5 or 20 day timeline was authorised.

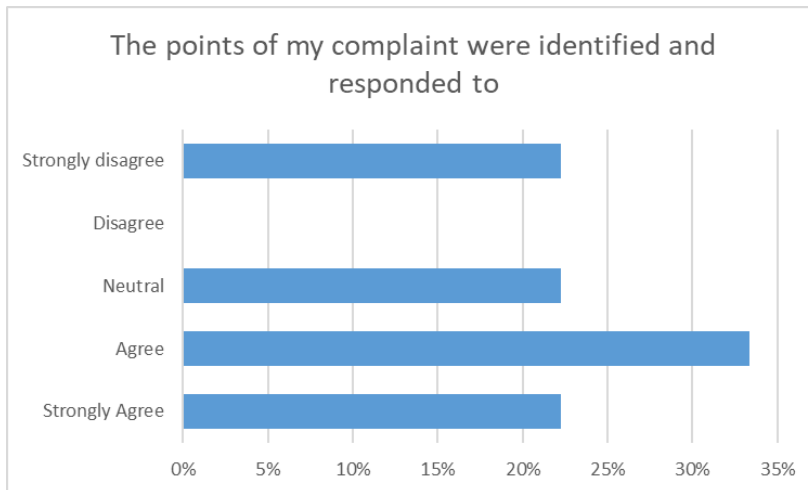
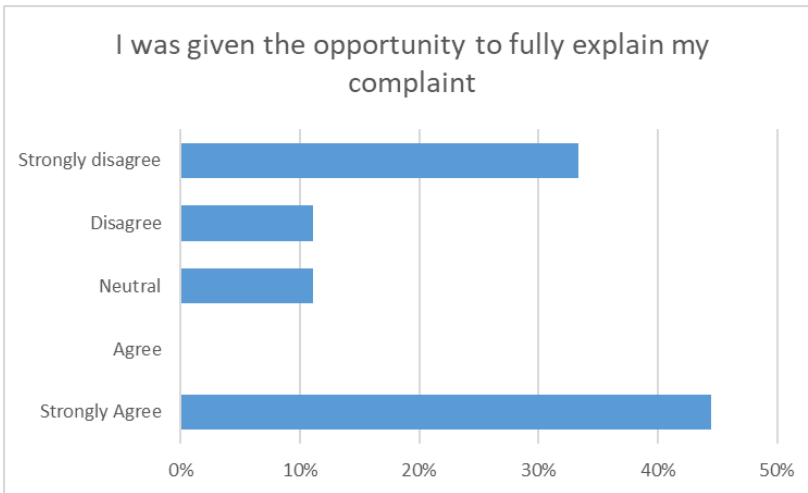
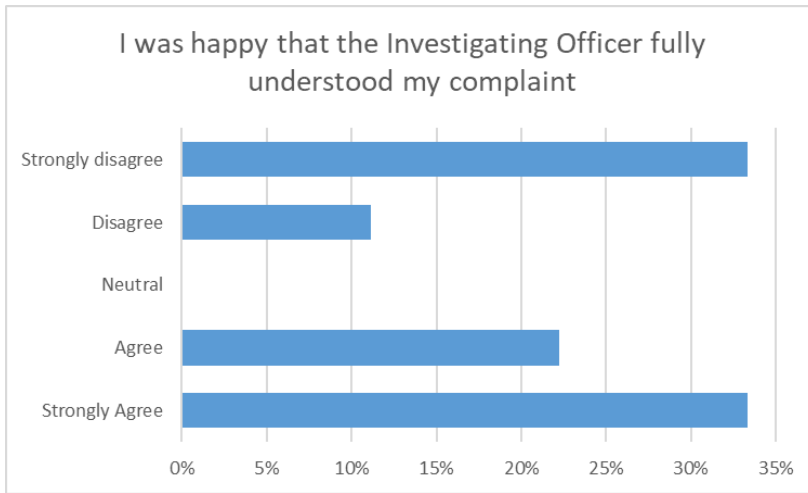
- **Stage 1** – 3 extensions agreed 1%
- **Stage 2** – 26 extensions agreed 31%
- **Escalated** – 0 extension agreed 0%

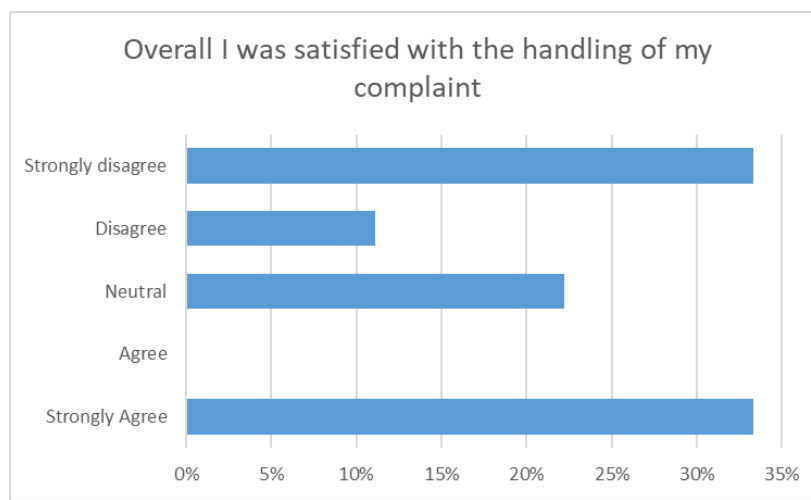
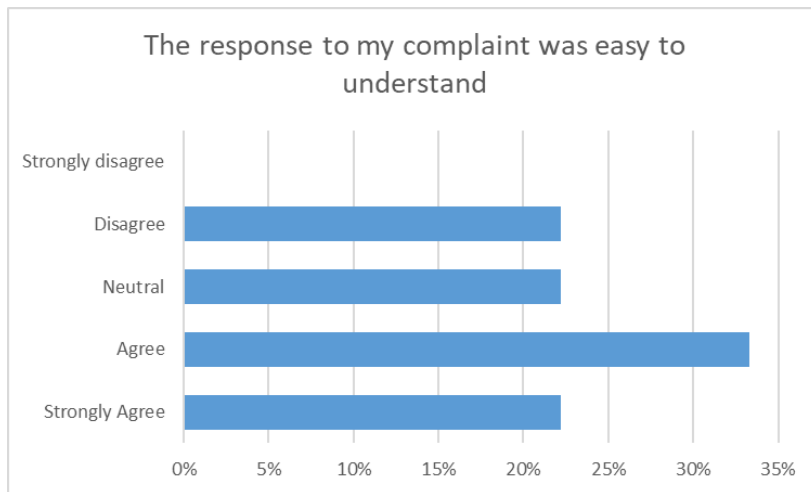
Looking at these figures, it is perhaps not surprising that more extensions were required at stage 2 than stage 1 as these complaints tend to be more complicated. Comparing with 2023-24, we have improved on the number of extensions at stage 1; down from 4.6% (5 extensions) - to 1%. Performance is similar for Stage 2 extensions, 17 in 2023-24 (27%) and 26 in 2024-25 – 31%.

## 10. Indicator 7 – Customer Satisfaction

As soon as a complaint has been closed on our system, we send a short survey to the person who made the complaint. This is really valuable feedback and can help us to identify problems or improvements. The following graphs help to show the feedback we have received in 2024-25:







## 11. Indicator 8 – Learning from Complaints – Reporting

As well as the oversight provided by our managers, throughout the year we report figures to Committee meetings every 3 months as part of the ways we manage our performance. These are included as key performance indicators, alongside each Directorate’s data and other organisation-wide information like freedom of information responses, audit recommendations and sickness absence.

This gives councillors a chance to discuss the complaints figures and ask for any further information. An example of a recent performance report, with the complaints figures included in Appendix D, can be found here - [Shetland Islands Council Committee Information - Submission Documents](#)

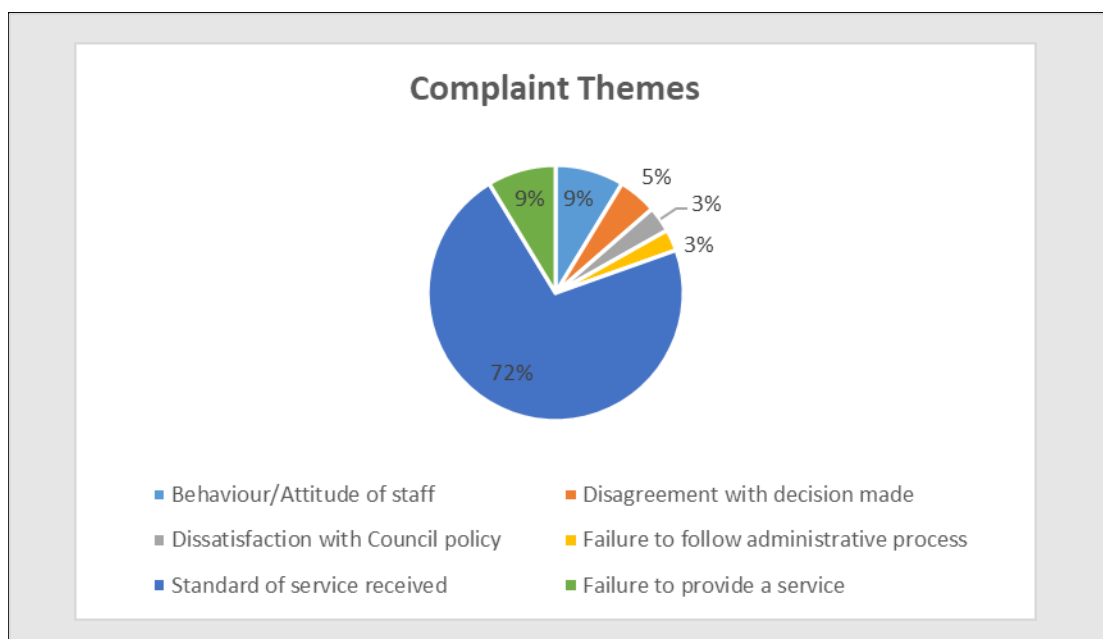
Footage from our Committee meetings is available to view through our webcasting library, here: [Webcast library - Shetland Islands Council Webcasting](#)

## 12. Indicator 9 – Learning from Complaints – Improvements

Looking at the data overall helps us to understand if there are any patterns in the types of complaints we receive and where we can plan improvements. The figures for 2024-25 show that, by

far, the theme most complained about relates to the standard of services received. It is perhaps no surprise this is the case as something going wrong with a service would seem to be a natural reason for making a complaint.

We note that failure to provide a service and behaviour/attitude of staff are joint second highest, and we will do more work to understand the reasons for these, however, the failure to provide a service theme has dropped from 17% to 9%, and behaviour/attitude of staff has also dropped from 18% to 9%, showing signs of improvement. It is interesting to note in the satisfaction data mentioned in the previous section, 45% of respondents said that they felt they had been given the opportunity to fully explain their complaint and 65% felt that the points in their complaint had been identified and responded to. Similar to previous years, it is perhaps less about the staff who are managing the complaints and more focused on service-related issues.



### 13. Referrals to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

When our Council’s procedure has been completed at Stage 2, complainants who remain dissatisfied with the response they have received can refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Further details of the SPSO’s function are available on their website: [Home | SPSO](#) Over the 2024-25 financial year, five complaints about the Council were referred to the SPSO for review. None of these resulted in follow-up investigation. This is an important piece of performance data, helping to provide some external validation of the fact Council staff are effectively applying our processes.

## 14. Positive feedback

Learning also comes from the positive feedback we receive as a Council, as we share and embed good practice across the organisation. In 2024/2025, a total of 76 compliments were logged.

- 65 compliments were for Community Health & Social Care. Most of the compliments were in Adult Care services.
- 9 compliments were logged in Infrastructure Services. Most of those were in the ferries service and usually recounting experiences where crewmembers had provided excellent customer service.
- 2 compliments were received for Development Services

Some examples of the positive comments received included:

### **Community Health & Social Care: -**

*“Came out of a meeting with care staff and felt confident... It's a huge relief to know that my mum is in the right place... Thank you so much for your help... “*

*“You, and your colleagues, truly care deeply for the people you work with every day. The kindness and delight your staff clearly felt in the achievements shared, was so lovely to witness. And the time, thought and nurture to assist your service users to develop their potential was so clear. Seeing the delight and pride in their faces as they received their awards, in that beautifully decorated room, is something that shall remain with me for a long time.”*

### **Infrastructure: -**

*“We are very aware that the ferry service is much complained about. We have used it many times since we arrived and were particularly in need of it over the past weekend when my husband was admitted to hospital. I spent the following days travelling to and from the hospital and I brought him home on Monday. I was expecting to experience some disruption due to the weather, but I felt the ferry workers pulled out every stop to keep it running, particularly on Monday.”*

*“I understand there are issues related to staffing - as there are in many job sectors, and that the ferries are ageing. However, I would really appreciate if the people working on this ferry could be recognised in some way for the service they provide. This last weekend made me realise what an excellent service the ferry provides and at a time of personal anxiety I was able to rely on it. I would finally like to thank the lady in the ferry office at Ulsta, who was very helpful when I asked for information on Monday morning. This human contact would have been removed down south.”*

*“I would like to express my gratitude on the service received today in reference to booking various journey ticket and the helpful information regarding places of interest on Unst and Yell. In addition, it was refreshing to have what I call “traditional customer service”. The staff member had a very pleasant disposition and couldn't have been more helpful; I can only hope that management can identify them through my booking and be praised accordingly. So many organisations could learn so much from your approach”*